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Letter dated 11 March 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you information on the efforts of the Republic of Uzbekistan aimed at the protection and promotion of the rights of women (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 64, "Promotion and protection of human rights".

(*Signed*) Murad **Askarov**
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Annex to the letter dated 11 March 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Efforts by the Republic of Uzbekistan to protect and promote the rights of women

From the first years of its independence, Uzbekistan began setting the main features of Government policy for preventing discrimination against women. Its policy is not to tolerate discrimination against women, since discrimination hampers participation by women, on equal terms with men, in all spheres of national life and makes it hard for them to exercise their rights and develop their potential to the full.

Women's contribution to the welfare of the family, the social importance of motherhood and women's role in procreation and child-rearing are all growing. State and society are promoting changes in the traditional role of both men and women in society and the family.

Uzbekistan has acceded to the principal international instruments regulating the principles and standards for the protection of the rights of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the International Labour Organization Maternity Protection Convention and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The laws of Uzbekistan guarantee women the right to work on equal terms with men, as an inalienable right of all people; to equal employment opportunities; to free choice of occupation; to education; to social security in the event of retirement, unemployment, sickness or disability; to health care; and to safe working conditions.

Uzbekistan has special programmes to develop the health-care system, protect the health of pregnant women and children and raise a healthy generation. Over the years since independence, a comprehensive social support system for mothers and children has been set up. Social services and public assistance accounted for 51 per cent of total expenditures under the State budget in 2006, and in 2007 had already reached 54.3 per cent.

An institutional framework has been established to coordinate women's rights activities at the Government and local levels. The Chairperson of the Women's Committee is also a Deputy Prime Minister and the chairpersons of provincial women's committees are the deputy *khokim* (local executive authorities) of the corresponding geographical areas. The proper conditions have been created for the development of women's non-governmental organizations, which are an important element of the national system to protect women's rights.

In order to increase women's representation in Government and exercise of their political rights, a 30 per cent quota for women out of the total number of candidates for deputy put forward by political parties was established under the Oliy Majlis (Elections) Act. Two milestones were set during 2007 and 2008: for the first

time in the history of Uzbekistan, a woman was put forward as a candidate for President and a woman was elected Speaker of the lower house of Parliament.

Women occupy 15.3 per cent of senior posts in the executive, including 16.7 per cent of Cabinet Ministers, 12.5 per cent of members of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and 11.9 per cent of *khokim* (governors) and deputy *khokim*.

Women make up more than half the country's population (50.02 per cent), and 52 per cent of all women are of childbearing age (from 15 to 49 years old). The average age of women at marriage is about 20, and 60 per cent of women marry between the ages of 20 and 24. About 32 per cent of children are born to women in that age group.

Medical examinations are available for women of childbearing age at primary health-care institutions in all regions of the country, as are contraceptive methods for women in need of assistance to prevent unwanted pregnancy or practice birth spacing. The efforts undertaken have resulted in a 26 per cent decrease in maternal mortality — from 32 per 100,000 live births in 2002 to 23.8 in 2007.

Efforts to combat HIV/AIDS have been stepped up since 2000. In 2007, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the 2007-2011 strategic programme to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Uzbekistan condemns violence against girls and women and domestic violence. The latter — violence committed within the family or among relatives — is regarded as a criminal offence for which various punishments are imposed under the legislation in force.

Violence against women, trafficking in women and sexual harassment are criminal offences in Uzbekistan under the Criminal Code, articles 118, 119 and 121, on offences against sexual freedom, articles 128, 129 and 131, on offences against the family, young persons and morality, and articles 135 and 136, on offences against freedom, honour and dignity; the Family Code regulates rights and obligations between spouses and those parents in relation to their children.

Special institutions have been established to assist female victims of violence, including crisis centres, hotlines, women's centres, health centres and many other social and psychological centres operating in various regions of the country.

Uzbekistan welcomes the fact that the United Nations, as the universal international organization whose authority is recognized by all States, pays close attention to the protection and promotion of the rights and freedoms of women. Thus, the issue of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men was discussed at the fifty-third session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City. A special event was organized as part of the Commission's work in honour of International Women's Day on 5 March 2009. At that gathering, the Secretary-General condemned violence against women, stating that it is an abomination and an attack on the foundations of our civilization. He mentioned that one year ago he announced the launch of the Unite to End Violence Against Women campaign.

Such members of the United Nations as the International Labour Organization (ILO), believe that the global financial and economic crisis will cause an increase in unemployment among women. In its annual report on employment trends among

women, the ILO notes that during the current year some 22 million members of the fair sex may lose their jobs. Experts predict that in 2009 unemployment among women will reach 7.4 per cent, a record level. Among men, it will be lower, at 7 per cent. ILO experts fear that the economic crisis will cause inequality in the incomes of women and men to intensify.

The Government of Uzbekistan is taking pre-emptive measures in that area. Referring to the impact of the international financial and economic crisis and ways and means of surmounting it at the national level, President Karimov highlighted the fact that job creation and the expansion of work from home, which relies upon cooperation with industrial enterprises, are of particular importance in Uzbekistan. Accordingly, an effective, comprehensive system of incentives for both employers and the public has been established. At the present time, that way of resolving the employment problem, and of providing an additional source of income to supplement the family budget, is of tremendous social significance as a way of drawing people into productive activity, especially those from more vulnerable social groups, such as women, and in particular those with many children. In 2008, at-home workers produced goods and provided services worth $25 million.

A particularly sensitive and respectful attitude towards women, linked to a great extent to the traditions, customs and culture of the Uzbek people, serves to promote an appropriate level of protection of women's rights in Uzbekistan. The comprehensive programme to protect women's rights which the Government of Uzbekistan has been carrying out in recent years has already allowed for the appropriate and just representation of the fair sex in Uzbek society, not only in all spheres of community life and the economy, but in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government as well. It is no coincidence that one of the most respected symbols of the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, is the monument of the Happy Mother. An ordinary Uzbek woman with a kind face and happy eyes symbolizes the Homeland, life and wisdom.